

**THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY 326th COMMENCEMENT  
AUTUMN 1993**

**"INTEGRITY: THE SEARCH FOR PRINCIPLE"**

by

**The Honorable Damon J. Keith  
United States Court of Appeals  
for the Sixth Circuit**

**December 10, 1993  
St. John Arena  
Columbus, Ohio**

**INTEGRITY: THE SEARCH FOR PRINCIPLE**

PRESIDENT GEE, MEMBERS OF THE ADMINISTRATION, TRUSTEES, AND DISTINGUISHED FACULTY OF OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY: I CONGRATULATE YOU WHO HAVE WORKED SO HARD TO BRING ABOUT THIS DAY OF GRADUATION FOR THESE STUDENTS. YOU ARE TO BE COMMENDED FOR YOUR COMPETENCY AND MOTIVATION OF THESE GRADUATES. I ALSO CONGRATULATE HONORARY DEGREE RECIPIENTS DON KIRKHAM, SENATOR HOWARD M. METZENBAUM, {THIS IS MY FIRST OPPORTUNITY OF MEETING THE DISTINGUISHED SENATOR. I HAVE ALWAYS BEEN A GREAT ADMIRER OF HIM AND HIS INTEGRITY. THE TOPIC OF MY COMMENCEMENT ADDRESS TODAY IS "INTEGRITY: THE SEARCH FOR PRINCIPLE". I BELIEVE THAT NO MAN HAS MORE INTEGRITY AND PRINCIPLE THAN SENATOR METZENBAUM. SENATOR METZENBAUM, YOU DID NOT RETREAT! YOU DID NOT ABDICATE! YOU DID NOT YIELD! YOU MET THE CHALLENGE HEAD ON. YOU HAVE NEVER STOOD ALOOF AND REMAINED SILENT IN THE FACE OF INJUSTICE AND INTOLERANCE. I WANT TO PERSONALLY PAY MY TRIBUTE BY SALUTING YOU THIS MORNING BECAUSE YOU

HAVE STOOD FOR EQUAL JUSTICE UNDER LAW.} AND CHIEF JUSTICE THOMAS J. MOYER AND DISTINGUISHED SERVICE AWARD RECIPIENT DR. JOHN G. KRAMER. THANK THEM FOR THEIR INDIVIDUAL CONTRIBUTIONS AND ACHIEVEMENTS WHICH MAKE THEM SO DESERVING OF RECOGNITION TODAY.

I ALSO WANT TO CONGRATULATE THE PARENTS, RELATIVES, HUSBANDS, WIVES, SWEETHEARTS AND FRIENDS . . . AND MOST IMPORTANTLY, THOSE OF YOU GRADUATING TODAY ON YOUR PERSEVERANCE, TENACITY AND PURSUIT OF EXCELLENCE. I KNOW THIS INSTITUTION HAS IMPARTED THESE VALUES IN YOU, BECAUSE THEY ARE REFLECTED IN MY GOOD FRIEND IN DETROIT, MAX FISHER, A GRADUATE OF OHIO STATE WHOSE GENEROSITY AND APPRECIATION OF THIS GREAT UNIVERSITY RECENTLY MOVED HIM TO GIVE \$20 MILLION TO OHIO STATE.

THESE VALUES ARE ALSO EMBODIED IN ANOTHER OHIO STATE GRADUATE, ROBERT M. DUNCAN, WHO SERVED WITH ME ON THE U.S. DISTRICT COURT, AND WAS A FORMER OHIO STATE SUPREME COURT JUSTICE AND JUDGE ON THE MILITARY COURT OF APPEALS. PRESENTLY, HE SERVES AS GENERAL COUNSEL TO

THIS FINE UNIVERSITY.

I AM NOT HERE TODAY TO IMPART ANY PARABLES OR PREACHINGS AS TO WHAT IS RIGHT. RATHER, I'D LIKE TO SIMPLY ASK FROM A MORAL STANDPOINT, "IN A WORLD OF COMPETING INTERESTS, A WORLD OF INCREASING CULTURAL, RELIGIOUS AND POLITICAL DIVERSITY, HOW CAN PEOPLE OF GOOD WILL GET ALONG? WHAT IS 'RIGHT?'. HOW CAN WE DEVELOP A FORMULA FOR RIDDING OURSELVES OF HATRED, BIGOTRY, ANTISEMITISM, AS WELL AS SEXISM. WHAT ARE WE TO DO?"

DR. MARTIN LUTHER KING EXPLAINED THAT:

COWARDICE ASKS THE QUESTION, "IS IT SAFE?";

EXPEDIENCY ASKS THE QUESTION, "IS IT POLITIC?";

VANITY ASKS THE QUESTION "IS IT POPULAR?"

BUT CONSCIENCE MUST ASK THE QUESTION, "IS IT RIGHT?"

AND THERE COMES A TIME IN ALL OF OUR LIVES WHERE WE CANNOT DO WHAT IS SAFE, WHAT IS POLITICAL OR WHAT IS POPULAR. WE MUST DO WHAT IS RIGHT.

THERE IS NOT A DAY IN MY LIFE THAT IN SOME WAY, LARGE OR SMALL, I AM NOT REMINDED OF THE FACT THAT I AM AN



AFRICAN-AMERICAN AND I AM BEING JUDGED ON MY COLOR RATHER THAN MY ABILITY, MY INTEGRITY AND MY CHARACTER. THE CHALLENGE THEN - TO YOU GRADUATES - IS TO HELP ELIMINATE THIS FALSE STANDARD OF EVALUATION, A WRONG OF THE PAST.

I ADHERE TO DR. KING'S ADMONITION, AND I TAKE IT ONE STEP FURTHER BY ASKING MYSELF, "HOW CAN WE CREATE A FORMULA OF RIGHT, AND OF PRINCIPLE? ONE WHICH ALLOWS PEOPLE TO COMMUNICATE, COEXIST, LEARN FROM AND EVEN APPRECIATE ONE ANOTHER? IN SHORT, WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?"

MANY SELF-RIGHTEOUSLY BELIEVE OUR SOCIETY HAS ALREADY DETERMINED WHAT "RIGHT" IS. THESE INDIVIDUALS WOULD LIKE TO BIND ALL FUTURE GENERATIONS TO CURRENT AND PAST DEFINITIONS OF "RIGHT."

WHILE SOME HAVE SURRENDERED THEIR SEARCH FOR VIRTUES, I BELIEVE THAT THIS IS JUST THE BEGINNING IN OUR QUEST FOR DETERMINING WHAT "RIGHT" IS. WHILE I BELIEVE YOU WILL BE THE FUTURE SCIENTISTS, EDUCATORS, DOCTORS,

LAWYERS, POLITICIANS AND BUSINESS LEADERS OF THIS COUNTRY, I ALSO REALIZE THAT YOU WILL HAVE A GREAT IMPACT IN DETERMINING WHAT "RIGHT" IS.

AS WE MAKE THE TURN INTO THE NEXT CENTURY, TECHNOLOGICAL INNOVATION AND CORNERING THE WORLD'S ECONOMIC MARKET SEEM TO BE OUR PRIME OBJECTIVES. THE LAST PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION FOCUSED LARGELY UPON OUR ECONOMY. I RECOGNIZE AND APPRECIATE THE IMPORTANCE OF SCIENTIFIC ADVANCEMENT AND THE GROSS NATIONAL PRODUCT.

I AM NOT SUGGESTING WE DISOWN TECHNOLOGICAL AND ECONOMIC EVOLUTION. RATHER, I PROPOSE THAT ADDITIONAL OBJECTIVES INCLUDE EMBRACING THE CONTINUING INNOVATION OF PRINCIPLE, AND CORNERING THE MARKET OF EQUALITY. I BELIEVE MOST OF US MUST REEXAMINE BOTH OUR PERSONAL INTEGRITY AND THE CODE OF PRINCIPLES WE SHARE AS A SOCIETY. THE WORLD IS CHANGING. SOME REGIONS, SUCH AS SOUTH AFRICA, THE EASTERN BLOC COUNTRIES AND THE MIDDLE EAST ARE CONFRONTING THESE PROBLEMS HEAD ON. THIS METAMORPHOSIS IS NOT PAINLESS, BUT NECESSARY, AND

THESE AREAS WILL EVENTUALLY PROFIT - - ECONOMICALLY, POLITICALLY AND MORALLY - - FROM THE STRUGGLE THEY ARE UNDERTAKING TODAY.

AS AMERICANS, WE CANNOT SELF-RIGHTEOUSLY REST UPON THE LAURELS OF OUR PAST MORAL GROWTH, AND ONLY RAISE THE QUESTION OF PRINCIPLE TO EXPORT AND APPLY IT TO OTHERS. TO MAINTAIN A POSITION OF WORLD LEADERSHIP, WE MUST CONSTANTLY REEVALUATE OUR OWN MORAL FABRIC AND TAILOR IT TO FIT THE DOMESTIC PROBLEMS OF THE DAY. DEMOCRACY, BY NATURE, IS AN EVOLVING CONCEPT WHICH IS VERY RARELY COMPLETE. AS WE STRUGGLE TO DELIVER FOOD AND MEDICAL CARE TO SOMALIS VICTIMIZED BY THOSE WHO USE STARVATION AS A WEAPON OF WAR, WE MUST ELIMINATE SHALLOW PSYCHOLOGICAL BARRIERS AND PREJUDICES WHICH EXCLUDE CERTAIN AMERICANS FROM RESOURCES AND EXPOSE THEM TO AIDS, CRACK AND CRIME. OUR CONCERN ABOUT TRIBAL WARFARE IN BOSNIA SHOULD BE ACCOMPANIED BY AN INTEREST IN THE GANG WARFARE OF SOUTH CENTRAL LOS ANGELES AND EVERY OTHER MAJOR AMERICAN CITY. AS WE ATTEMPT TO



RESTORE LIFE IN SERBIA AND LIBERTY IN SOUTH AFRICA, WE MUST ENSURE THE PURSUIT OF HAPPINESS TO ALL AMERICANS THROUGH ADEQUATE EDUCATION, HEALTH CARE AND EMPLOYMENT.

THIS IS NOT TO SAY THAT ONLY ECONOMICALLY DISADVANTAGED AMERICANS SUFFER WHEN WE FAIL TO CONFRONT THESE MORAL CHALLENGES. AS ABRAHAM LINCOLN DECLARED IN 1858, "AS I WOULD NOT BE A SLAVE, ALSO I WOULD NOT BE A MASTER." PERHAPS THE RICH AND POWERFUL ARE EVEN MORE IN NEED OF PRINCIPLED INTROSPECTION, FOR THEIR EXCESSIVE RESOURCES ALLOW THEM NOT ONLY TO DEPRIVE OTHERS, BUT DESTROY THEMSELVES THROUGH MORAL INAPTITUDE.

PERHAPS MANY IGNORE THESE CHALLENGES BECAUSE THEY BELIEVE THAT, AS INDIVIDUALS, THEY ARE POWERLESS IN SOLVING THE PROBLEMS OF OUR NATION. BUT I AM HERE TO ENCOURAGE ALL OF YOU TO MAKE YOUR VOICES HEARD. THE PROBLEMS ARE NOT SO COMPLICATED AND DIFFICULT THAT AS INDIVIDUALS WE DON'T COUNT. AS WE LOOK BACK ON HISTORY,



**GREAT MOMENTS AND MOVEMENTS HAVE STARTED WITH THE ACTIONS OF A SINGLE INDIVIDUAL.**

- 1. IN 1776, THOMAS JEFFERSON WROTE: "ALL MEN ARE CREATED EQUAL." THIS SIMPLE DECLARATION FORMS THE BASIS FOR ALL WE HOLD DEAR IN THIS COUNTRY.**
- 2. IN 1861, FREDERICK DOUGLASS SAID, "FREE MEN CAN VOTE THEMSELVES INTO SLAVERY, BUT SLAVES CANNOT VOTE THEMSELVES FREE."**
- 3. IN 1955, ROSA PARKS REFUSED TO GO TO THE BACK OF THE BUS IN MONTGOMERY, ALABAMA, AND SET THE STAGE FOR THE GREATEST CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT IN OUR NATION'S HISTORY.**

**ALTHOUGH THESE STATEMENTS AND ACTIONS REFLECT COMMON TRUTHS TODAY, EACH OF THESE INDIVIDUALS ANALYZED, WORKED THROUGH, AND STRUGGLED WITH WHETHER THE UNDERLYING CONCEPTS WERE "RIGHT." YOU, AS INDIVIDUALS, MUST CREATE THE TRUTHS OF TOMORROW BY**

EXAMINING TODAY'S REALITY AND CHALLENGING THE INDIVIDUAL INSIGHTS OF YESTERDAY. DO NOT HELPLESSLY AND BLINDLY ACCEPT THAT ALL PAST TRUTHS ARE ABSOLUTE OR FLAWLESS. FOR EXAMPLE, DUE TO THE INDIVIDUAL EFFORTS OF SOME OF OUR FEMALE CONTEMPORARIES, WE ARE NOW REALIZING THAT "ALL PERSONS ARE CREATED EQUAL."

NOT UNLIKE THE UNITED STATES CONSTITUTION, PAST PRINCIPLES EVOLVE AND ARE CONSTANTLY MODIFIED AND REINTERPRETED TO REFLECT OUR CHANGING TIMES. OUR SHARED MORAL CONSTITUTION MUST INCLUDE BOTH THE STABILIZING ROOTS OF OUR PAST AND THE CONTINUOUSLY GROWING BRANCHES, WHOSE LEAVES REACH OUT FOR THE LIGHT OF THE FUTURE.

AS I ADVISE AGAINST ABANDONING THIS EVOLUTION BY COMPLETELY RETREATING INTO THE PRINCIPLES OF YESTERDAY, I SUGGEST YOU NOT SURRENDER THE STRUGGLE BY MERELY ADOPTING THE VALUES OF TODAY'S POLITICAL STATUS QUO. LANIGUINIER RECENTLY ANALYZED HER LIFETIME COMMITMENT TO CIVIL RIGHTS AGAINST THE UNSTABLE POLITICAL

ATMOSPHERE OF THE MOMENT BY QUOTING A WEST AFRICAN WRITER: "THE POET WHO IS NOT IN TROUBLE WITH THE KING, IS IN TROUBLE WITH HIS WORK." I WOULD HOPE YOU CONSTANTLY FOCUS ON THE POETRY OF PRINCIPLE WHICH RESONATES IN YOUR MIND AS OPPOSED TO PARROTING THE POLITICS OF POWERFUL KINGS AROUND YOU.

THIS MORAL PROGRESS IS A CONTINUOUS PROCESS . . . A NEVER ENDING STRUGGLE. IT REQUIRES YOU AS INDIVIDUALS, AND US AS A SOCIETY, TO TAKE INVENTORY OF OUR CONSCIENCES AND MAINTAIN VALUES AS WE EXPERIENCE BOTH SUCCESS AND FAILURE. IT IS WEARY AND TIRING, BUT I ASK YOU TO PERSEVERE AS YOU HAVE ENDURED YOUR COURSE WORK HERE, BECAUSE STRUGGLE IS NECESSARY FOR REFORM. AS ABOLITIONIST FREDERICK DOUGLASS STATED MORE THAN A HUNDRED YEARS AGO:

IF THERE IS NO STRUGGLE, THERE IS NO PROGRESS.

THOSE WHO PROFESS TO FAVOR FREEDOM AND YET DEPRECATE AGITATION, ARE MEN WHO WANT CROPS



WITHOUT PLOWING UP THE GROUND, THEY WANT RAIN  
WITHOUT THUNDER AND LIGHTENING. THEY WANT THE  
OCEAN WITHOUT THE AWFUL ROAR OF ITS MANY  
WATERS.

YOU ARE MEN AND WOMEN OF DESTINY, YOU HOLD THE KEY  
TO THE FUTURE OF AMERICA IN YOUR HANDS. ALL OF YOU ARE  
TALENTED. INEVITABLY, MANY WILL BECOME RICH. PERHAPS  
SOME WILL BECOME FAMOUS. BUT MORE SIGNIFICANTLY, I  
FERVENTLY HOPE ALL OF YOU WILL BE MEN AND WOMEN OF  
INTEGRITY.

I RETURN TO MY FRIEND, AND YOUR FELLOW ALUMNUS, MAX  
FISHER. IN ADDITION TO ACQUIRING WEALTH, POWER AND  
ACCLAIM, MAX IS KNOWN THROUGHOUT THE WORLD AS A MAN  
OF ABSOLUTE INTEGRITY. HE IS A PERSON OF RECONCILIATION,  
A HEALER, WHO USES HIS MANY SKILLS TO BRING PEOPLE  
TOGETHER. HE SEES THE BEST IN EVERYONE, AND HIS OPTIMISM  
LEADS HIM TO BE A GREAT BELIEVER IN THE MAJOR CITIES IN  
AMERICA, FOR HE KNOWS OF THE UNTAPPED POTENTIAL. MAX

**HAS BEEN AN ADVISOR TO PRESIDENTS OF THE UNITED STATES AND PRIME MINISTERS AND IS OFTEN CALLED UPON FOR HIS WISE COUNSEL. THEY ALSO KNOW THAT HE IS A MAN OF INTEGRITY AND PRINCIPLE.**

**JIM CAMPBELL, FORMER CEO AND GENERAL MANAGER OF THE DETROIT TIGERS, IS ALSO A GRADUATE OF THIS INSTITUTION. JIM MADE A MARK IN BASEBALL IN TERMS OF HIS ADMINISTRATIVE SKILLS AND TALENTS. HE BROUGHT TWO WORLD CHAMPIONSHIPS TO DETROIT, AND IS ALSO THE MAN WHO HIRED SPARKY ANDERSON AFTER THE CINCINNATI REDS FIRED HIM. IN ADDITION TO HIS PROFESSIONAL ACHIEVEMENTS, JIM IS A MAN OF INTEGRITY....**

**PLEASE REMEMBER-**

- TALENT IS GOD-GIVEN, TREAT IT WITH HUMILITY.**
- FAME IS MAN-GIVEN, TREAT IT CAREFULLY; BUT**
- INTEGRITY COMES AS THE RESULT OF A CONSCIOUS AND CONTINUOUS SEARCH FOR THE HIGHEST PRINCIPLES OF LIFE. GUARD THIS PURSUIT WITH YOUR VERY LIFE.**

**INTEGRITY IS COMPRISED OF CONSTANTLY PROCESSING, CONSIDERING, ANALYZING AND ASPIRING TOWARD WHAT IS RIGHT. REMEMBER THE WORDS OF BENJAMIN E. MAYS, PRESIDENT EMERITUS OF MOREHOUSE COLLEGE:**

**IT MUST BE BORNE IN MIND THAT THE TRAGEDY IN LIFE DOESN'T LIE IN NOT REACHING YOUR GOAL. THE TRAGEDY LIES IN HAVING NO GOAL TO REACH. IT ISN'T A CALAMITY TO DIE WITH DREAMS UNFULFILLED, BUT IT IS A CALAMITY NOT TO DREAM. IT IS NOT A DISASTER TO BE UNABLE TO CAPTURE YOUR IDEAL, BUT IT IS A DISASTER TO HAVE NO IDEAL TO CAPTURE. IT IS NOT A DISGRACE NOT TO REACH THE STARS, BUT IT IS A DISGRACE TO HAVE NO STARS TO REACH FOR. NOT FAILURE, BUT LOW AIM IS SIN.**

**SO ADOPT THE GOAL, DREAM, AND REACH FOR DETERMINING "WHAT IS RIGHT." NO ONE IS ALWAYS RIGHT, BUT THE PERSON WHO DOES NOT ASPIRE TO DO RIGHT IS ALWAYS WRONG. DO NOT SACRIFICE YOUR GOAL OF DOING RIGHT BECAUSE YOU ARE SOMETIMES WRONG.**



AS PREVIOUS GENERATIONS PASS FROM THIS WORLD, THEY WILL WATCH TO SEE IF YOU HAVE THOSE SPECIAL QUALITIES OF HUMANITY, COMPASSION, UNDERSTANDING AND MOST IMPORTANTLY, INTEGRITY THAT WILL ENABLE YOU TO ELIMINATE THE SOCIAL INJUSTICES WHICH BESET US. TODAY, AS YOU COMMENCE YOUR JOURNEY INTO THIS WORLD, I WISH YOU SUCCESS, HAPPINESS AND GOOD FORTUNE, BUT MOST IMPORTANTLY, I HOPE YOU FULFILL THE REQUIREMENTS NECESSARY TO GRADUATE FROM THIS LIFE WITH A DEGREE IN INTEGRITY.

**EDWIN HALL REALIZED:**

I AM ONLY ONE, BUT STILL I AM ONE.

I CANNOT DO EVERYTHING, BUT I CAN DO SOMETHING.

AND BECAUSE I CANNOT DO EVERYTHING,

I WILL NOT REFUSE TO DO WHAT I CAN.

IF YOU LADIES AND GENTLEMEN - DISTINGUISHED GRADUATES - DON'T MEET THIS CHALLENGE, I ASK YOU - WHO WILL!